

Reorganizing the Tank Battalion TOW and Scout Platoons

Capt SD Gobin

Expeditionary Warfare School

Major AB Irvin, CG 7

05 January 2009

Report Documentation Page				Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188	
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1. REPORT DATE <b>05 JAN 2009</b>		2. REPORT TYPE		3. DATES COVERED <b>00-00-2009 to 00-00-2009</b>	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE <b>Reorganizing the Tank Battalion TOW and Scout Platoons</b>				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S)				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) <b>United States Marine Corps,Command and Staff College, Marine Corps Combat Development Command,Marine Corps University, 2076 South Street,Quantico,VA,22134-5068</b>				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT <b>Approved for public release; distribution unlimited</b>					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT					
15. SUBJECT TERMS					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT <b>Same as Report (SAR)</b>	18. NUMBER OF PAGES <b>11</b>	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT <b>unclassified</b>	b. ABSTRACT <b>unclassified</b>	c. THIS PAGE <b>unclassified</b>			

Marines fighting the Global War on Terrorism confront adversaries that are adaptive, decentralized, and elusive. Recognizing the overwhelming conventional superiority of U.S. forces, our enemies will continue to develop new tactics designed to exploit perceived seams in our capabilities, or to otherwise undermine our advantages in mobility, firepower, sensing, and command and control. In order to maintain our dominance on the battlefield, it is essential that we continuously adapt our methods of warfighting, while remaining a flexible, combined-arms force.<sup>1</sup>

Now more than ever, the modern battlefield has changed how the Marine Corps organizes, equips, trains, and fights. Small unit leaders are relying on their creativity and ingenuity to meet these unique challenges. Specifically, TOW and scout platoon commanders are rethinking the organization and employment of their units. Currently, tank battalions' TOW and scout platoons are organized under the Headquarters and Service Company. The Marine Corps should organize the TOW and scout platoons into an anti-armor company to provide the tank battalion an addition maneuver unit with a more effective

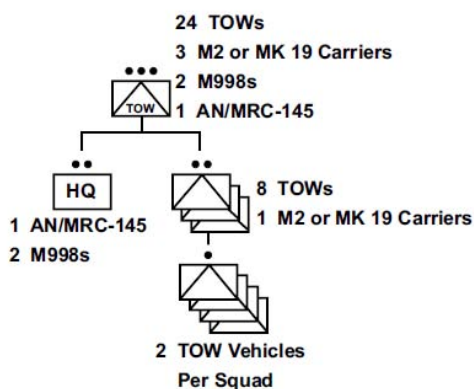
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<sup>1</sup> United States Marine Corps, *A Concept for Distributed Operations*, (Washington, D.C.: Headquarters Marine Corps, 2005), I.

leadership structure that is qualified to conduct a wider range of tactical tasks and is better prepared to fight in the contemporary operating environment.

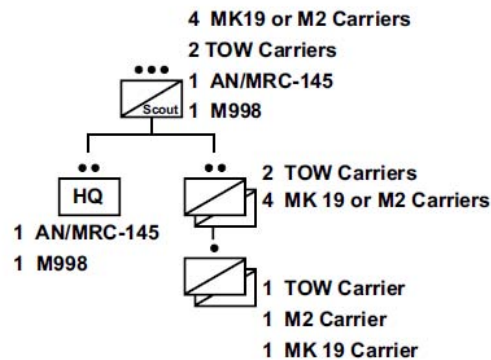
### **Current TOW and Scout Platoon Organization and Employment**

The primary mission of the TOW platoon is to provide counter-mechanized support that utilizes the TOW system to engage and destroy enemy armored vehicles, particularly tanks. When not performing its primary mission, the TOW platoon may assume a secondary mission of engaging other point targets or providing limited security to the commander in the form of a screen or observation posts. According to the TOW Platoon's table of organization and equipment the platoon is authorized 69 Marines and 30 HMMWVs.



The tank battalion's scout platoon performs reconnaissance, provides limited security, and assists in controlling the battalion's movements. According to the scout platoon's table of

organization and equipment the platoon is authorized 24 Marines and 8 HMMWVs.<sup>2</sup>



Currently, the TOW and scout platoons are being deployed in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom as mobile assault platoons in both doctrinal and non-doctrinal roles. Consequently, platoon commanders have discovered that these platoons are not organized or equipped to fight on the modern battlefield successfully.<sup>3</sup>

### **TOW and Scout Platoon Issues**

The TOW and scout platoons possess the potential to be combat multipliers for any battalion commander because of the amount of personnel and equipment they bring to the fight. Unfortunately, they are limited by their doctrinal organization.

First, one of the inherent problems is the lopsided size of the two platoons. While the scout platoon is what one would expect a platoon-sized element to be, the TOW platoon is three

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<sup>2</sup> United States Marine Corps, *Marine Corps Warfighting Publication 3-12, Marine Corps Tank Employment*, (Quantico, VA: Marine Corps Combat Development Command, 2005), 10-1-10-3.

<sup>3</sup> Captain Benjamin Adams, Interview, 10 October 2005

times as large. The size of the TOW platoon becomes a leadership challenge for the TOW platoon commander and platoon sergeant, that is, balancing the administrative requirements against the maintenance and training requirements of the unit.<sup>4</sup>

Second, both platoons face a number of security challenges in restrictive and urban terrain. Most HMMWVs have only two Marines per vehicle, a driver and a gunner, thus leaving no one available to dismount from the vehicle.

Third, the TOW variant HMMWVs are not equipped with a machine gun mount. Therefore, gunners do not have the option of shooting enemy targets with a machine gun and are only left with the option of firing either a 9mm bullet or a TOW missile.

Lastly, because the platoons are structured under the Headquarters and Service Company, a lack of oversight exists. The headquarters and service company commander has to divide his attention between the 489 personnel and 10 sections that reside in the company.<sup>5</sup> This leaves a gap in supervision: No one is available to ensure the continuity of training and proper employment of the platoons.

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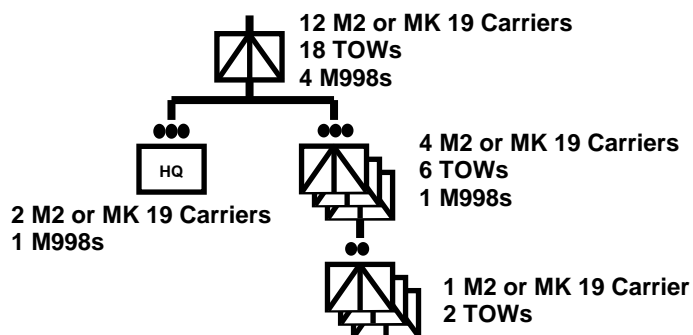
<sup>4</sup> Coleman, John and David Badger, "TOWs: Where do they belong?" *Marine Corps Gazette* 6 (1990): 34.

<sup>5</sup> United States Marine Corps, *Table of Organization, Headquarters and Service Company, Tank Battalion*, (Washington, D.C.: Headquarters Marine Corps, 2003).

Because of these issues, TOW and scout platoon commanders are forced to reorganize their platoons to effectively fight on today's battlefield. However, each platoon commander organizes, equips, trains, and fights their platoons differently.

### **Proposed Anti-Armor Company Organization and Employment**

The mission of the anti-armor company would be to perform the original missions of the TOW and scout platoons in addition to the missions of an infantry mobile assault platoon. The company would be authorized 157 Marines, 3 Corpsman and 34 HMMWVs split into three equal platoons.



The reorganization will require changes in major end items and an increase in personnel strength. The tables below reflect the proposed changes but do not break out personnel strength by rank or MOS.

Table of Equipment	TOW Platoon On Hand	Scout Platoon On Hand	Anti-Tank Company Requirement	Delta
AN/MRC-145	1	1	0	+2
M998	2	1	4	-1
TOW	24	2	18	+8
M2/MK19 Carrier	3	4	12	-5
Table of Organization	TOW Platoon On Hand	Scout Platoon On Hand	Anti-Tank Company Requirement	Delta
Marine Officer	1	1	4	-2
Marine Enlisted	68	23	153	-62
Navy Enlisted	0	0	3	-3

Currently, most of the enlisted Marines in the scout and TOW platoons possess the MOS of 0352 TOW gunner. The anti-armor company would require a mix of 0311 riflemen, 0331 machine gunners, and 0352 TOW gunners.

#### **Advantages of the Anti-Armor Company Organization**

Organizing the TOW and scout platoons into a company structure provide a number of advantages both to the Marines and to the tank battalion: Having a dedicated company commander and company staff will ensure training continuity and proper



logistical and administrative support. Additionally, the battalion commander will have the flexibility of employing three platoons or nine sections to conduct any of the anti-armor, scouting, or mobile assault unit missions.

Furthermore, when tank units are employed in restrictive or urban terrain, they are task organized into team tank or team mech with mechanized infantry units. With the proposed anti-armor company, the tank battalion could task-organize into teams organically. This organic capability would facilitate a higher level of proficiency as teams. Also, this organic team structure would be ideal for current deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan.

In 2005, General Hagee signed off on the concept of distributed operations. The anti-armor company's organization is consistent with this concept: The anti-armor company would be a highly mobile force that is flexible enough to fight within the entire spectrum of conflict. The company could be employed as dispersed units throughout a large area of operation while operating toward a common aim.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> United States Marine Corps, *A Concept for Distributed Operations*, I.

## **Counterarguments to the Anti-Armor Company Organization**

One of the most obvious disadvantages to the reorganization is the personnel increase of 67 Marines and Sailors, but this increase in personnel is necessary in order to have two dismounts per HMMWV. Another disadvantage is the reduction in the number of TOW variant HMMWVs, but this reduction is offset by an increase in the number of heavy machine gun variant HMMWVs which is more consistent with the threats on today's battlefield. Lastly, one could argue that there would be a decrease in the proficiency of conducting anti-armor or scouting missions because each platoon would have to learn both skill sets, but the standardization of training and SOPs established by the company commander would result in a more efficient use of training time and a higher level of proficiency.

## **Conclusion**

With the ever changing enemy threats on the modern battlefield, the Marine Corps must review how it organizes, equips, trains, and fights. These changes should allow for the flexibility to face modern enemy threats as well conventional enemy threats. The reorganization of the TOW and scout platoons into an anti-armor company will give the tank battalion commander the flexibility to do both. Word count: 1,244

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